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ON

# ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

DELIVERED IN

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, TROY, N. Y.

ON

CHRISTMAS EVE

BY

THE REV. THOMAS W. COIT, D.D., LL.D.,  
RECTOR.

HARTFORD:

PUBLISHED BY THE CHURCH PRESS COMPANY.

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## NOTICE.

On Christmas Eve, I have for many years been in the habit of taking up topics somewhat aside from the usual routine. This year, I was particularly requested to make Ecumenical Councils my subject. The learned will be good enough to remember that I had to address a promiscuous audience, few of whom, probably, were familiar with the topic on which I was desired to dwell; so if they find some things said which they may deem unnecessary, and others left unsaid which they expected to hear about, I hope they will excuse me.

“Then pleased it the Apostles and Elders, with the whole Church.”—Acts, xv. 22.

O Almighty God, who hast built thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head corner-stone; Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made an holy temple acceptable unto thee. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



## ECUMENICAL COUNCILS.

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Having been asked, in reference to the very interesting attitude of Christian affairs, to take for my present disquisition the subject of Ecumenical Councils, and desiring always to avail myself of such hints from parishioners and my brethren of the clergy, it will now be my endeavor to comply with the wishes expressed to me. Let me beg my hearers to remember, that I am to treat my subject, if I mean to instruct, in a didactic way, and not in the more fashionable but less useful way of a sensational oration.

Ecumenical is a word derived from the Greek tongue, in which the noun *ecu-me-ne* (if I may spell it in English), signifies the household of men, or the habitable globe. Hence the adjective *ecumenical* is employed to mark something, which belongs to mankind generally. Applied to the household of Christian men, or the habitable globe occupied by Christians, it means much the same thing as the continually misapplied, perverted, and abused word, Catholic.\*

\*Episcopalians say in church, before God, that they believe in

It differs from the word *encyclic*, as belonging to an assembly of individuals, calling themselves a Catholic or General Council, or assuming the prerogatives of such a Council, and not to such a Council's *documents*. An encyclic (you can easily perceive its origin) is an *encircling* or widely comprehensive *document*, conveying the wishes, intentions, or directions of a largely influential personage, or assembly. We might call it a general circular. When it is issued by the Governor of a State, or by the President of our Republic, we call it a proclamation.

Councils are political, sometimes, as well as ecclesiastical. For example: some are familiar with the word Council, as a part of the government of the State of New York, and as still composing a part of the government of the State of Massachusetts. Of course, it is with councils ecclesiastical, and not with councils political, that I am now to deal; and it may spontaneously and right away be asked, in the minds of some of my hearers, What had early Christianity to do with Councils? and, Where did it get the hint, or derive the precedent, for such con-

the Holy Catholic Church. Ask nine in ten of them, when they come out of doors, if they are Catholics. Oh no; they are Protestants! Why will they any longer belie themselves, and give away a word which they appropriate in a solemn creed?



gresses or conventions? And my answer is, Councils were nothing new to the early representatives and professors of our religion. No less than seven important gatherings, which may be called councils, were held under the Jewish Dispensation—the first under Joshua, in the times of the Theocracy, and the last under Hyrcanus II., about sixty-five years before Christ ; thus showing that they pervaded the whole of ancient Jewish history.\*

From such an exhibition it appears, not natural only, but almost inevitable, that similar predicaments should draw together Christian Councils, as soon as the exigencies of Christianity rendered such assemblies necessary. And one was necessary, immediately after our Lord's ascension. The idea was not entertained a moment, that the first and most prominent office of the Christian ministry was a slight and temporary matter. By no means. If it were, such a place as that of Judas would never have been filled again. It would have been forsaken, as his own wretched carcass was upon its suicidal gibbet, whence it tumbled down, a mass of putrefaction, and

\* See Grier's *Epitome of the Councils*, pp. 1-3. This is a valuable manual, of which the late Dr. Hawks entertained a high opinion. It is worth reprinting, with notes adapting it to the times. It was issued at Dublin, in 1828.

burst asunder. But so far was the Apostolic and Episcopal office from falling into discredit, by the occupancy of a traitor, that it was avowed to be a matter, not of expediency and propriety, but of absolute necessity, that it should be refilled without delay. The pronunciamiento of St. Peter, under our Lord's express injunctions—given during his sojourn of forty days on earth, after his resurrection—was in the following terms, “Of these men, who have companied with us,” “must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection?” *Must* is the word, not *may*. And, too, to be a witness for the whole system in which the resurrection is a culminating and crowning fact—the resurrection being put here, by synecdoche, for all the great facts of Christianity; just as, by the same figure of speech, faith, the first of the Christian virtues, and baptism, the first of the Christian sacraments, are put in our Lord's last and most comprehensive commission, for all that is “generally necessary” in inward and outward religion.\* To suppose the Apostles were intended to be special witnesses of the resurrection, as a single and isolated fact (as some imagine,

\* Synecdoche is a word that means to put things in one, which might otherwise be separate. It expresses much in a little. The phrase “generally necessary” is quoted from the Catechism. I suppose it means the same as universally, *i. e.*, for all.



who suppose their office temporary), is a most unfortunate mistake ; since women were witnesses of this fact before them, and more than five hundred persons after them, at a single opportunity (I. Cor. xv. 6).

A Council, then, was held for the continuation and perpetuation of the Christian apostolate ; or of an episcopate, or superintendency, extending beyond a single congregation.

Another Council was held for an inauguration of a new office in the ministry, the diaconate ; and though we are not told so expressly (any more than we are when the order of presbyters or elders had its origin), for the inauguration of deaconesses, as well as deacons. I venture on this suggestion as not an overbold one, since one of the early deaconesses is alluded to by name in the Epistle to the Romans, and was honored with a commission which would now not be too small for a metropolitan or a pope. Phebe, the deaconess, was the actual bearer of St. Paul's longest and grandest Epistle to a Church which was soon esteemed, on account of its position in the Roman Empire, as the most dignified one in Christendom.\*

\* Phebe was a deaconess of the Church at Cenchrea, which was the port of Corinth. Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans at Cor-

Another Council was held in A.D. 46, in the then centre of Christendom, for the determination of a question which was convulsing Christendom, viz., How far are Gentiles bound to keep the precepts of the Mosaic Economy? The details of this Council's sittings are given us in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles; and among those details, permit me to say in passing, nothing is plainer than that the President and Chief of that Council was not St. Peter, but St. James, "the Lord's brother," the first Bishop of Jerusalem. James was at home—was on his own throne—and said, with a papal supremacy, "Wherefore my sentence is." If Peter had uttered that potential annunciation, we should have had changes rung upon it, louder than could be pealed from that bell of all bells, which lies silent in the Kremlin at Moscow.

So you see, that before we leave the Bible—or the times of the Bible—no less than ten important Councils (seven Jewish and three Christian) rise to meet our view, and demand our curious and devout consideration. And

inth. And the Church at Corinth had as good a right to trump high as the Church of Rome. St. Paul and St. Peter *together* consecrated Dyonisius its first Bishop (Eusebius, Bk. II. chap. 25). The date of the Council of Jerusalem (A.D. 46) is Dr. Burton's. Others have it 51.



if we do not find them very soon after the Canon of Scripture was concluded, very good reasons can be given for the apparent discontinuance of bodies of such consequence.

The first three centuries of the Christian Era were centuries in which Christianity passed through a grand and almost exhausting struggle for continuous existence, for, as one might say (speaking as a Churchman), her apostolic succession.\* The powers that be, the world at large, were confederate against her. The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers took counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, according to the forewarnings of prophecy. Persecution after persecution rained the hailstones and firecoals of malignity upon her; and finally, in the hottest persecution and the last, rained them upon the buildings and documents, as well as upon the living representatives of the Religion; when it seemed as if the very name of Chris-

\* "Apostolic succession" is a phrase which many quarrel with who know nothing of its consequence. There is an apostolic succession to Christianity itself, or its historical continuity is lost. There is an apostolic succession to the Canon of Scripture, or that is lost too. There is an apostolic succession for the doctrine of the Trinity, or the Unitarians are right. For Infant Baptism, or the Baptists are right. For visible sacraments, or the Quakers are right. And so on. People who quarrel with apostolic successions know not what they do.



tianity was to be hunted and hounded from the *ecumene*, or habitable globe. (Eusebius. Bk. viii., chap. 2.)

Such a season was not one for calm, deliberate bodies like Councils, taking advice for the ecumenical welfare of Christianity, and providing for its progress and extension. Certainly not. And accordingly for three hundred years we find Councils (if we find them at all) local, partial, and circumstantial. But when the last hurricane of passion and hatred had spent its fury, and Christianity could look around her with the supervision of a statesman, the condition of affairs was radically altered. Particularly was this the case after the famous edict of toleration, by a Roman Emperor, in A.D. 313. Then at length Christianity was able to rear her head among the superstitious and the cruel, who had striven to prostrate her in the dust, and ask for rights as a constituted independency.

Accordingly, in the year 325 (twelve years after the so-called edict of Milan in Lombardy), we are brought into contact with what is styled her first general or world-wide gathering, *i.e.*, her first and ever most memorable Ecumenical Council. It was assembled in Nice, one of the capitals of Bythinia, in Northwestern Asia Minor (now called Izneek), but a few miles south of Nicomedia (now called Izmeed), the Eastern home at the time of the



Roman Emperors, and not very distant from the capital of the Roman Empire, as afterward established, viz., the city of Constantinople—a city with a name as undying and as inexhaustible, as the boasted eternal city in the middle of Italy.

It was the Council there assembled, which drew up the main portion of that formulary still called the Nicene Creed, and which we repeat occasionally—not as often perhaps as we should do—in the services of the Church we call our own.

The function which this Council assumed, in drawing up that instrument, was unquestionably its most important one; and must, at the proper moment, receive our special consideration. At present, I am most concerned to tell you, that in calling itself an Ecumenical Council, or a grand synod for universal Christendom, it did so, because it *represented* all Christendom; in other words, the entire Holy Catholic Church. As a consequence, this Council was not a self-originated or a self-constituted body, but a *representative* body; called together in the name, and by the consent, of Christendom at large. Evidently, most evidently, all Christendom could only be represented by itself—could only be summoned and gathered by its own consent, and could be bound by no acts which itself did not originate and sanction. A council, par-



tial as to its extension, constrained as to its deliberations, hampered in its action, crippled and beleaguered as to its issues, may be a council, but it is no Ecumenical Council. It does not represent the voice, the will, or the freedom of Christendom; and, as such, cannot bind Christendom by any of its pronouncements.

These things seem almost or quite self-evident; and yet no one, but a student of ecclesiastical history, and especially of that part of it which respects dogmas or theological opinions, can by any possibility appreciate the immense, and immensely solemn importance, of having an Ecumenical Council genuine, *i. e.*, of having it truly representative and truly free. For if it is not a representation of the whole Church, it cannot speak with the authority of the whole Church; and if it be not free, it cannot speak the voice of the whole Church, as a voice spontaneous, accountable, guiding, and directive.

So to have an Ecumenical Council a representation, and a free representation of the Church Catholic, has been considered, from time immemorial, a qualification perfectly indispensable; particularly has this been the case in the East. For as one of our consuls, who has lived in the East, most correctly observed, lately, in the *New York Times*, "The Greek Church preserves the municipal character and freedom of thought, by which



it has always been distinguished from that of Rome, and which it borrows from the republican character of the people, in the days when it was planted there [in the East] by the Apostles.”\* And now to show you, how the indispensable qualification alluded to, has been provided for, I must speak somewhat of the geography of the Church, in the days when Ecumenical Councils began their formal existence, and were provided for in a formal way.

The Church Catholic, notwithstanding its sufferings by persecution, had so extended and multiplied itself, that its primitive unity became incompatible with a single centre, (as when the Council of Jerusalem was summoned), and its centres had also to be multiplied. The principal, though not the only, centre for the West was Rome; because Rome was the elder capital of the Roman Empire, and could communicate with, and send messages unto, the outskirts of the Empire, in Central and Western Europe, more readily and rapidly than any such centre in Asia and in Africa. Wherefore, Rome became a Patriarchate; and very easily and very naturally, the first of the Patriarchates into which Christendom was primarily divided. A Patriarchate was wanted also in Africa—

\* New York *Times*, Dec. 6, 1869.



then covered with bishoprics, which since have disappeared—and this was placed at Alexandria. And as Alexandria, the old capital of the Ptolemies, and a radiant point for philosophy, literature and the arts, was then the second city of the Roman Empire, the Bishop of Alexandria became the second Patriarch of ancient Christendom. A Patriarch was also wanted for Asia, as well as for Africa and the West, and he was fixed at Antioch, on the Orontes, the old capital of the Syrian monarchs, once so eminent and towering in Oriental history. The Romanists will have it, that Antioch was primarily the see of Peter, and thus the first of Christian Patriarchates. If it were, it seems profoundly singular, that “the shadow of Peter passing by” should not have consecrated it to a higher destiny. It soon became the lowest of the Patriarchates; while the exaltation of a Patriarchate, altogether new, and having no ecclesiastical recommendation, put it a grade lower in the grand list final. There could not be a clearer demonstration, that these Patriarchates (all of them—Rome’s as well as all the rest), grew out of reasons of expediency, and not out of provisions in the New Testament, or the logic of dogmatic theology.

With the three Patriarchates, of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch, the subject of Patriarchates had a long and



uninterrupted rest. The West had its peculiar and proper head. The South had such a head, and the East had such a head; and this was all Christendom needed or demanded, for many a long day. The "ancient customs" about such things were recognized and honored by the Council of Nice, in one of its canonical enactments. But, by and by, the grandest empire of the world required subsection as well as the so-called Kingdom of Heaven—*i. e.*, the domain on earth of a celestial king. The unwieldy Roman Empire wanted a new capital; and, in A.D. 330, Constantine the Great founded for such a purpose, the city which has existed, and through the direst vicissitudes has come down to our own then far distant and most problematic times. The name of Constantinople—the city of Constantine—is as familiar to you as that of Rome—the city of Romulus. Still, it was originally a political name, and not a Christian one. Yet, as soon as it became formally, what an old fashion called it, New Rome, or the capital of the Bas Empire, or Lower Empire, second to nothing on earth, but the great Empire of the West—just as soon, almost, the question was agitated, whether Constantinople should not rank as high in the Church as it did in political distinction and in governmental sovereignty. This question came up for discussion and decision in the second Council Ecumenical,



which sat in A.D., 381. It was determined in favor of Constantinople, and in spite of all remonstrances and menaces of old Rome, or, as we should now say, Papal Rome—remonstrances and menaces which never gave way but with the grimmest grace and the most puckered onlook, for more than eight hundred years. When Constantinople, during the times of the Crusades, became temporarily subject to Western influences—a fief of Western autocracy—then, at last, it was discovered and conceded that the Patriarch of Constantinople might be second to none but his brother Patriarch, who nestled among the seven hills, so notorious in Italian history and the annals of the Church.\*

Nor was this the end of the ancient system of the Patriarchates. When Christianity spread easterly and southeasterly, into Mesopotamia and Arabia (places which had some converts to grow from even on the day of Pentecost), then a fifth Patriarchate was established, which took the name of the Mother Church of Christianity, and its first centre and point of radiation, the nucleus of Jewish antiquity, the city Jerusalem. This Patriarch-

\* Constantinople was subjected to the Latins in 1204, and redeemed by the Greeks in 1261. In 1215, at the fourth Lateran Council, Innocent III. confirmed the rank of Constantinople.—Neale's Introduction to his History of the Holy Eastern Ch., p. 29.



ate was established by the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (a town about opposite to Constantinople, across the straits), which sat in A.D. 451, and which developed and carried out the system inaugurated in A.D. 381—the date of the Council which first gave Constantinople a rank, to which its age (but half a century) did not entitle it, but which was thought accordant with its civil and political elevation.\*

Nothing is plainer, from these and parallel facts, which I have not time even to mention, than that the rank of ancient dignified Christian ecclesiastics was regulated, not by ecclesiastical position, but by the civil and political importance of the sees they occupied. In fact, the Ecumenical Council of 451 did not hesitate to declare, in just so many words, that Constantinople ought “to be magnified in ecclesiastical matters, even like the elder imperial Rome, as being next to it.” If “ecclesiastical matters” had had their proper preponderance, Jerusalem would have been the first, and not the last of the Patriarchates; and a French Abbé was so fully persuaded of this, that he wrote a pamphlet to induce Pius IX. to

\* Justinian tried to establish a sixth Patriarchate, but did not succeed. All shows that Patriarchates grew out of the times and not out of Divine appointment, like grades in the ministry.—Robertson's Ch. Hist., first ed., pp. 500, 501, vol. I.

make Jerusalem his home—a pamphlet which reached its second edition thirteen years ago!\*

I may seem to have spent too much time, in showing how the ancient patriarchal system of the Church Catholic was constituted; but you will now perceive, how I can make my observations practical.

The establishment of the Patriarchal system brought on with it (perhaps necessarily, in connection with the fact that an Ecumenical Council should represent all Christendom), the practice of consulting the five great heads of Christendom, and obtaining their consent, before an Ecumenical Council could be summoned. This practice grew naturally into a custom, which, like multitudes of unwritten laws, became as authoritative as laws recorded in a statute-book. And now we begin to approach a point, which becomes intensely interesting, and very momentous, in relation to the so-called Ecumenical Council, at present in session, in the city of Rome, under the auspices of Pius IX., the acknowledged head of that which is properly called the Roman Church—

\* *La Papauté a Jérusalem*. Par L'Abbé J. H. Michon, Paris, 1856.—The original, for the quotation just before, may be found in Routh's *Opuscula*, II., 69.



it is so styled in the creed of his predecessor, Pius IV.—but which is not the Church Catholic, or universal.\*

It is as easy as intuition to see, that with *five* chief heads, instead of *one*, primitive Christendom was a republic, and not a monarchy, with one solitary individual as not its head merely, but its autocrat, its irresponsible sovereign. Such, doubtless, is the favorite theory of ultramontane Romish theologians;† and it was with this

\* The idea of calling the Latin Church by its strictly proper name, “Roman,” has been followed by some of the most zealous devotees of the (so-called) Holy See. Thus, the Spaniards presume to insert it into a Catholic Creed—the Apostles’. See Meyrick’s *Ch. of Spain*. London, 1851, p. 172. On p. 167, in a note, Mr. Meyrick says, “The evils exhibited in these Letters do not, for the most part, belong to Spain as Spain, but to Roman Catholic countries as such.” On p. 172, he notices that the Apostles’ Creed has been altered in *two* particulars. Meyrick’s is an invaluable book.

† Ultramontane and cismontane are, as to Romanism, much the same words, as high-church and low-church among ourselves. Two sides exist everywhere. The ancient Jews had their Pharisees and Sadducees. The later Jews their Gaons and Seburians, *i.e.*, conservatives and radicals. The Congregationalists have their orthodox and their liberal. The Presbyterians their Old School and their New School. The Baptists, their hard-shell and their soft-shell. The Methodists, their silent and their noisy. The Quakers, their orthodox and their Hicksites. “A smart free-thinker,” as Alex. Pope said, can be “all things in an hour.” While alluding to high-church and low-church, I beg to give an answer about them, which may help the younger clergy. A rector was once asked about them, by a lady, while a sharp-eyed warden was looking on,



theory that Luther and Calvin waged relentless war. Luther and Calvin were not enemies to *an* Episcopacy, but to *the* Imperial Episcopacy of the Popedom. They assented to the hierarchy of England, where bishops are scarcely more than Lord Lieutenants of counties, having less influence in the Church, than many of our State Governors in civil matters. The favorite theory along the banks of the Tiber undoubtedly is, that Christendom in the aggregate, as a Catholic whole, is not a republic, but an imperial monarchy. The so-styled Pope is the Emperor of this world-wide dominion, with supreme authority over all its interests, and over the very faith it should profess. By virtue of this authority he, in the year 1864, issued what he called a Syllabus of the errors floating over Christendom, endangering its peace, threatening its safety, and calling for summary correction. The Syllabus not sufficing, he now calls a Council, ostensibly of universal Christendom, to aid him in his attempted regeneration of the times by arresting their progress, and throwing them back into the shapes

full of curiosity. A high-churchman, said the rector, is one who holds the doctrines and usages of his Church in high estimation; and a low-churchman is one who holds them in low estimation. Good, said the warden. That is it, exactly. And his opinion was well worth the having.



and attitudes of the Middle Ages, when his predecessors came nearer a practical demonstration of Rome's favorite theories, than they have since done, or than may ever be done again. To accomplish this formidable task, this most gigantic undertaking, he demands for himself the accordance of personal infallibility. Doubtless, this would cap the climax, alike of assumption and ambition, and render his task, so far as presumption could effect it, one of trifling cost and triumphant grandeur.

But to say nothing of trouble at his own doors, within his own immediate household, the old theory of a Christian Republic confronts him, on the threshold of his enterprise, and contradicts him flatly, as to the postulates with which he starts.\* The successors of the departed Patriarchs of the East answer him, just as their forerunners would have done, that he is wrong, utterly, irredeemably wrong, in the very first step which he is taking. He is doing what he does (so they frankly tell him) as a dictator, and not as a fellow-counsellor. It was his sim-

\*The idea of considering Christendom a great republic was not new even among Romanists, three hundred years ago. Thus, the celebrated Abp. De Dominis, in his ponderous and profound treatise on Church Polity, boldly declared, in the tenth section of his conspectus, that the Church had ceased to be *a church*, under the Roman Pontiff, and had become, under his temporal sway, a mere human government.



ple and his bounden duty, to take counsel with his colleagues in the Patriarchate—his co-equal representatives in the great Christian Republic—and act unitedly with them, in the consummation of such a most solemn, and solemnly momentous act, as that of calling a conclave, to affect religiously the terraqueous globe. This is, substantially, what the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Patriarch of Alexandria answered his messengers, when they waited on them, and would fain have wheedled them into compliance with the wishes of their patron. They replied to the messages, with which they were accosted, with princely courtesy, but with princely independence. They would not so much as handle the documents presented them, but returned them with the firmness of very autocrats. And so, doubtless, it has been, all over Oriental Christendom; and would have been in England, and with ourselves, had we been approached with anything like apostolic charity, as if we had a place, however narrow, on the broad platform of the old Communion of Saints. Most unamiably, and unchristianly, not to say antichristianly, we are—though we profess the same creeds which the Orientals honor—we are denounced, and held aloof, as heretics. Not as schismatics—not as misbelievers—but as actual outsiders from the Christian pale—as huddled into the same hideous cate-



gory, with infidels of the darkest shapes and names.\* And how is it possible to answer one, approaching us with such abhorrent names, such damning repudiation, but by meeting the attack point-blank, and pronouncing our assailant an apostate? I see not, even upon the basis of a canon of Pope Leo I., one of the tallest of his tribe, and who therefore is worth quoting, twice over. Leo's canon, as given by Dr. Barrow, is in the following words: "Whosoever doth effect more than his due doth lose that which properly belonged him."† To call a man a schismatic, *i.e.*, an errorist, about the Church's discipline or polity, I hold to be a thing quite subordinate and tolerable. But to call him a heretic, is to say that he denies, denies fundamentally and hopelessly, the faith, the historic faith of Christianity—the faith recorded in the oldest creeds, and transmitted as a part and parcel of the Church's actual identity. We can hold no parley with such calumniation, which strikes our very heads off; and if we think as poorly of Rome, as she does of

\*In the picture of a (so-called) Catholic Tree, Abp. Cranmer and his contemporaries are represented by dead and broken branches, in company with such atrocious wretches as Voltaire. A deadlier insult could not be perpetrated. And this for children to see, so that they may associate the names, and hate all alike!!

†Barrow's Works. Hughes's Edit. VII., p. 437; compare p. 351.



ourselves, she may thank herself for the commencement of such sad aggression.

You now see, my Brethren, how, on truly—not presumptively—on genuinely catholic principles; how, on the most ancient and best accredited rules of action, the Council lately convened at Rome has not the slightest title to the venerable appellation, Ecumenical. It is not Ecumenical, but sectional, partial, and exclusive. It is what canonists might call a synod, or a convocation. The Orientals had a gathering at Bethlehem, not many years subsequent to the final adjournment of the Romish gathering at Trent, in the Tyrol; and they called it but a synod. And this is all the name which the present gathering at Rome deserves, canonically. For it ignores the East, it ignores a large portion of its own peculiar home, the West. It begins with an assumption, as false as it is audacious, that the Patriarchate of Rome is, *ipso facto*, and by its own self considered, the Church Catholic. It transforms—I might say transubstantiates—the old republics of Christendom into a monarchy—worse, into an imperial monarchy—worse still, into an inerring monarchy; such as was aspired to by the Medes and Persians, some twenty-five hundred years gone by. There never was such a superhuman monarchy, entrusted to mortal hands. Satan, doubtless, when son of the morn



ing, in the purlieus of an unearthly throne, conceived of it, and clutched at it; and his example is all which can be quoted, in the way of precedent. I say Satan's is the only precedent; for the moment Peter fancied himself a Pope, and said "Not so," to his Master, as his successors have said to his Master's kingdom, that very moment his Master likened him to the infernal Devil! I seem, therefore to have *actual* infallibility on my side, for the parallel which has been indulged in.

This lecture has already, perhaps, become too long; though it would be easier to lengthen than to shorten it, and not to leave unsaid, and even unREFERRED to, many things which the theologian and the ecclesiastical historian might deem worthy ample notice. There is, however, one point more respecting Ecumenical Councils, on which it is important for me to comment, as well as upon their character as necessarily representative, and necessarily free. And this is their proper work, in relation to Doctrine and Discipline, the two most important parts of all genuine Religion. And here I must studiously contract my observations, and give the subject of Discipline the go-by.

And now, in reference to the action of an Ecumenical Council as to Doctrine, it is hastily and perhaps igno-

rantly supposed, that such a Council may venture on the composition of a Creed, as a creation of its own preferences and simple will. It can do no such thing. In fact, it can do nothing, *finally*. Its work aptly resembles the work of a Convention, delegated to frame organic law, or a civil constitution, which must be submitted to the people for their approval. If a Convention's proposed and published work is accepted by the people generally, the Constitution which has been framed by it, stands, and becomes a permanency. The same is the case with the completed work of a Council, when that Council adjourns without day, and spreads its records for the supervision of the Christian public, that is, before Christendom, far and wide. That work must receive the general acceptance of Christendom; or, as the old rule would construe it, must be owned and acknowledged by the five grand republics of the Christian world, the time-honored Patriarchates.\* It is on this ground, that the Nicene Creed, having been drawn up by two General

\* "The claim of a Synod to the estimation of a General Council depends entirely upon the general or universal reception of its decrees by the Catholic Church; and that no council is to be accounted general or universal, whose decrees are not generally or universally received by the Catholic Church."—Perceval on the Roman Schism, p. 17. So said Bossuet. See Palmer on the Church, 3d ed., ii. 113, 116.



Councils, and accepted by universal Christendom, or all but universal Christendom, for 1500 years, stands on higher authority, as a communion creed for universal Christendom, than any other doctrinal formulary whatever. As to the works of Councils, contemplated as a whole, the various views taken by different bodies of Christians, as to what should be received, and should remain as Catholic, amid their accumulated labors, has caused the acceptance of Councils, in different portions of the community of Christians at large, to vary singularly and widely. The Roman Church, for example, accepts some eighteen or nineteen; receiving parts of some, and rejecting parts of others, with a freedom which smacks strongly of the wilfulness of the (so-called) right of private judgment. The Greek Church accepts seven Councils; while we, if our Homilies may be taken as a criterion—the most learned of them is the one specially alluded to—accept six.\*

So much for the inherent authority of a Council, by name and nature Ecumenical. Such a Council has no

\* The Homily on the Peril of Idolatry. In my edition of the Homilies, p. 182, Dr. Field, in his elaborate and profound work on the Church, speaks of six Councils universally accepted for the Faith, and seven for Faith and Manners. Vol. iv., p. 61: Cambridge, 1852.

Ecumenical authority till it has been sanctioned, ratified, and acceptably established; any more than the provisions of the Convention of 1868 became a constitution, without the will, allowance, and consent of the people of New York.

And, now, a word further as to the part taken by an Ecumenical Council, in the composition of a creed.

It is simply and entirely ministerial; that is, its action here is vicarious, as the minister or substitute for another. Human authority can make canons—that is, ecclesiastical statute-law, not contrary to the general or constitutional provisions of Holy Writ. But no one, whether man or angel, can make an article of faith, but the “Author and Finisher of our faith,” the Church’s only head, the Church’s only king. And the office of his Church, as vicariously his body on earth, is to attest, and preserve, and perpetuate this faith, as it was “once delivered to the saints;” and thus delivered to them, not as heirs of his original and sole authority, but simply as trustees and executors of his last Will and Testament, who, with their legitimate successors, are to keep it safely, and hand it on unadulterated and uncontaminated, to the world’s last sundown. And when this faith, originated by God’s own Son, and put in trust by God’s own Son, has been tampered with—doubted of, de-



nied, opposed, counterfeited, and counteracted—then it is the office and the duty of the Church, by and through her representatives, summoned in Council Ecumenical, to turn to the records, reminders, and transmissions of the past, and ask what has come down to us, from the Fountain-Head, and come down unmixed and unimpeached. The Church here (to speak after the fashion of this world), simply follows out one of the great rules of interpretation, prevalent in our courts of law, about the exposition of ancient documents. “*Contemporanea expositio est optima et fortissima in lege*,” is the current maxim of the lawyer and the judge.\* It is the immemorial practice of the great assemblies of the Church. And their task, when labored out, goes back to their constituency for assent and consent; and, if ratified, becomes Christendom’s living and incorporated voice. That voice is a creed; and we believe a creed so constituted, identified, and ratified, because *then* it becomes the voice of the Church Catholic, the voice of Christendom, the voice of Christianity! And we hold up such creeds, as keys to the interpretation of the Bible, which no private interpretation may contravene. If

\* Contemporaneous exposition is the best and strongest, *i. e.*, most reliable, in law.—From Broom’s *Legal Maxims*, 2d ed., p. 532. Jeremy Taylor’s *Ductor Dubitantium*, Bk. III., ch. 6, §6.



Christianity could become incarnate, and could utter vocal sounds, they would be such as echo to us from the vistas of the past, in the articles of those time-honored epitomes called the Catholic Creeds.\* And therefore we receive *such* creeds, as testimony and not as mere theological opinions—as the solemn verdict of continuous history ; and not as efforts in metaphysics, like scores of systems and theories and confessions, which are incontestably the works of individuals, or of sections of Christendom. Not that I mean to slur or damnify such things. Not by any means ; for our Thirty Nine Articles belong to such a category. All I mean to contend for is, that such things, like our Articles, are (as *they* are, according to their own title,) articles of Religion, and not articles of *the* Catholic Faith ; and are binding not on the Church Catholic, in its character of a Communion of Saints, but on that part of it, which has incorporated them, into its standards of authority, interpretation, and peace.†

\* I do not think that we have bettered these Creeds, by beginning with “I believe,” instead of “We believe ;” as was undoubtedly the old custom in the East. “I believe” seems a voice from the regions of private judgment. “We believe,” seems a voice of the Communion of Saints. “I believe,” also, is not in analogy with the Lord’s Prayer. Even in private, no one says, “My Father who art in Heaven.

† I use the phrase “Communion of Saints” in its historic, and



Pius IV.—who was pope between 1559 and 1565—as the expounder of the decrees and canons of the Council of Trent, added twelve articles to the Nicene Creed, which consisted before of twelve articles only; and pronounced the whole compendium, the “true Catholic Faith, without which no man can be saved.” He could have done nothing more fatal to the pretensions of that body, as an Ecumenical Council. Pius IX., in 1854, added a thirteenth article to this Faith—declaring the nature of the Blessed Virgin immaculate, in spite of her death, and of the inspired declaration, that death is the wages of sin. He could have done nothing more fatal to his prerogatives, as an ecclesiastical patriarch. If, as one of his predecessors before quoted—and one of the proudest of them—hesitated not to say, when he wanted to tame another as proud as himself—if whoever doth affect more than his due, loses that which properly be-

not in its theological sense. Originally, it was a protest against Schism; and meant the Church in its concentration, while “Catholic” meant the Church in its diffusion, or extension. A Catholic Church might not be “at unity with itself,” unless, while it could comprehend all men, it could also unite all men into a single whole, by intercommunion. Hence, the Church, while Catholic enough to cover the whole globe, must be a communion, *i. e.*, intercommunion of saints, in order to hold together, and be “one body in Christ.”

longed to him ; then, in so doing, he deposed himself from the office which he usurped, and should have doomed himself, as a penance, to monastic seclusion and solitude.

And, now, if Pius IX. and his collaborators presume to multiply the articles of a faith for Christendom, and propound their novelties as necessities for salvation—how—this is the grand practical conclusion to end with—how are we to treat them? We may treat them with the consideration bestowed upon similar declarations by a government which still calls its head, His Apostolic Majesty, and used to accord him the more Italian title, King of the Romans. A Papal allocution denounced certain of the late popular laws of Austria, as Godless, and devoid of obligation.\* And how did Apostolic and Roman Austria welcome this impertinent interference with her sovereignty? She stood self-centred, tranquil and serene ; and such soaring vociferation went by her, like the wail of the wind through the gorges of her mountains. Unquestionably if the cases had been re-

\*If the Pope can pronounce a law of Austria Godless and devoid of obligation, so he can any law of the United States. How then can a member of the Roman Church profess allegiance to our government, without a mental reservation in the Pope's behalf? Is such allegiance honest? At any rate, is it reliable?



versed, if Austria had been as imbecile as the Pope was, and he as potential as the House of Hapsburg, his declarations would have come with the point of the bayonet, and, amid the thunder of shotted cannon, and might have been submitted to in moody and scowling stillness. They amounted, actually, to scarce the whistle of that shepherd's pipe, which we seem to hear when we think of Virgil's *Bucolics* amid summer's murmuring trees. They had not the respectable scream of a mortar's shell.

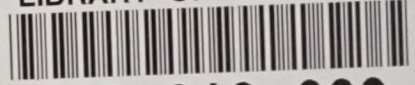
And so we may return to Rome the impeachment which she has so often flirted in the faces of those whom she stigmatizes as non-Catholics, and say that private interpretations are not to be respected as oracles—private judgments by no means to be listened to as Imperial decrees. We may say, and say with a self respect, as sustaining as the verdict of an honest and an illuminated conscience, that the free declarations of Christendom, through her assembled and unshackled representatives, shall always be heard by us, with the profoundest deference. And more. When those declarations are affirmed and consecrated, by the general consent of Christendom, we will embrace them (as we have done similar ones) with the homage of our hearts, and bow down to them with a reverential will. Such declarations will be to us,

the outspeakings of Christ's kingdom, united, as of old, into a Communion of Saints. They will ring in our ears, like echoes from Christ's own celestial throne. We will greet them, as the Blessed Virgin did an angel from the presence-chamber of Heaven ; and say, be it unto us according to their word !





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